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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR CONFRONTS SKEPTICISM OF BELGIUM'S
ABILITY TO LEAD IN MEETING WITH BELGIAN SENATORS

Classified By: Acting Political-Economic Counselor Robert Kiene for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: The Ambassador hosted a lunch attended by five members of the Belgian Senate Commission on Foreign Affairs and Defense on December 7. In their first meeting with the Ambassador, the Senators shared their concern about Central Africa, the International Criminal Court (ICC), nuclear proliferation, the environment, the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), trade protectionism and human rights (specifically for women and homosexuals). The Ambassador urged the Senators to act as leaders within Europe on solving the difficult issues of Afghanistan and Guantanamo. At least one Senator suggested that Belgium is not a natural leader among European nations, but the Commission's chair suggested that Belgium's role in Afghanistan and Guantanamo closure should be on the Commission's agenda. END SUMMARY

¶2. (C) Five members of the Belgian Senate Commission on Foreign Affairs and Defense attended a lunch on December 7 at the Ambassador's residence, including Marleen Temmerman (Sp.a) (the Commission's Chair), Alain Destexhe (MR), Philippe Mahoux (PS), Bart Tommelein (Open VLD), Elke Tindemans (CD&V), and Eric Gardinael (Staff Member of the Commission).

THE SENATORS' CONCERNS

¶3. (C) After a brief welcome, the Ambassador invited the Senators to list their specific areas of concern, which he then proceeded to address. Temmerman mentioned Afghanistan, nuclear disarmament, the need to improve official development assistance in accordance with the MDGs, and women's rights. Destexhe said that he would welcome greater U.S. involvement in Central Africa in support of the peace process and economic development. He requested the USG to review its policy towards the ICC, so that the ICC will be strengthened in its efforts to prosecute genocidal crimes committed in Rwanda and the Congo. Mahoux's concerns were with nuclear disarmament and the outcome of the COP 15 Summit on environmental issues in Copenhagen. Tommelein repeated the Senate's priorities in Central Africa and added a plea for "real tradpm. He expressed pleaur@ will attend the Copenh

¶4. (C) Destexhe said thly keep a record of such crimes, he Qaid. He added that, according to the World BQnk, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is t(e least favorable place to do business in the world and the USG should do more to encourage eform. Temmerman said that the "culture oQ impunity" for rape is the most significant o"stacle to implementing a roadmap to peace in the DRC. She said that DNA test kits cost 100 dollars each, but that more widespread availabilQty of such tests could help bring more

offenders to court and convict them.

15. (C) The Ambassador recalled for the Senators the Secretary's recent 11-day trip to Central Africa. The USG is trying to encourage the use of cellular phones as a tool to prevent rapes. However, he said, Belgium holds the keys to changing behavior in the DRC, and in many other areas. Proposals by the U.S. often encounter knee-jerk opposition in the UN and elsewhere. Similarly, other countries may be seen by some as having ulterior motives. However, when Belgium speaks, he said, it creates a different dynamic that can be

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even more effective. At the same time, he said, the sincere concern of the United States for human rights can be gauged by the people President Obama has chosen to lead the State Department. For example, Harold Koh, the Legal Advisor, is an expert on human rights and others who are equally notable for their scholarship on issues of justice, gay rights and labor unions have been appointed.

OBAMA AND DISARMAMENT

16. (C) The Ambassador told the Senators that President Obama is committed to a nuclear-free world. One has to watch the President as he speaks in order to judge his sincerity on any issue he addresses, including nonproliferation and disarmament. Who is thinking most about how to achieve that goal, he asked rhetorically. The President would like to move as fast as possible, but not unilaterally and not without coordination with our allies, the Ambassador said. It is important to maintain the security of all concerned, from Bahrain to Israel to Europe.

CLIMATE CHANGE

17. (C) The United States walked out of the Kyoto negotiations, but is present in force at Copenhagen, the Ambassador continued. A climate change czar, Carol Browner, has been appointed. The U.S. has promised to reduce carbon emissions by 17 percent. Belgium can help by working on ways to finance cooperation on climate change by developing countries and to avoid politicization of the proceedings in Copenhagen. He agreed that avoiding protectionism is an important objective.

SKEPTICISM OF BELGIUM'S POTENTIAL TO LEAD FINDS A VOICE

18. (C) The world is changing, the Ambassador said. Decisions are not made by the U.S. alone, nor even by the U.S. and Europe. Even the G7 has difficulty addressing world economic problems and the discussion has expanded to a G20, or the G-20 and its observers, he said. India and countries in Latin America hold a piece of the puzzle of peace and prosperity and in that context, Belgium has a role to play as a moral voice and should be a leader among Europeans. Belgium is not seen as having an ax to grind, the Ambassador said, and continued by saying that there are no small countries that have great leaders. As an example, Guantanamo could be closed in three weeks if European leaders met and decided they wanted it closed immediately. He suggested that Belgium could take the lead in calling such a meeting. He added that that kind of leadership would have no impact on the regional, linguistic and political differences that exist in Belgium but to the contrary would bring all Belgians closer together. In Afghanistan, he continued, the goal of security needs to be met so that civilian assistance can be effective. Belgium can and should step up in both areas, he concluded.

19. (C) Senator Destexhe asked whether the Ambassador would specify the number of detainees that Belgium should take, but

the Ambassador demurred while insisting that Belgium should nevertheless be a leader in this regard. Destexhe said that the Ambassador's words seemed very "messianistic" to him, and suggested that that is difficult for Belgium. The process by which Herman Van Rompuy became President of the European Council is emblematic of the European world view, he said, even though it was "not very democratic". However, Senator Temmerman said that the issue of Belgium's role could be put on the agenda of the commission for discussion. The Ambassador observed that there is no disagreement between the Senators and the United States over their goals, it is only necessary to look for ways to achieve them.

GUTMAN

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